

Coming: A Ton of Trouble

By MIRIAM OTTENBERG
Star Staff Writer

A ton of 96 percent pure Southeast Asian heroin — enough to satisfy more than one-tenth of all American dope addicts for a year — is headed this way as fast as its Chinese owners can gear up their smuggling apparatus to get it out of Asia.

This No. 4 or injectable heroin originally was destined for American troops in Vietnam.

First of Two Articles

But the withdrawal of the troops has left the narcotics smugglers literally holding the bag — in fact, thousands of hermetically sealed bags of heroin.

Presence of the vast oversupply of heroin was disclosed by John Warner, chief of the strategic intelligence office of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.

He said it's still "upcountry" — in the "golden triangle" of the opium trade, where Laos, Thailand and Burma meet. What BNDD hopes to accomplish with intelligence from the Central Intelligence Agency and Thai and Lao police is to "interdict" or block the movement of the heroin down the line to where it can be shipped to the United States.

"With the withdrawal of our troops and the stricter military controls to locate heroin users," Warner said, "the market for No. 4 heroin dwindled. In the tri-border area, the price has dropped to \$750 a kilo, which is just their break-even point.

"We speculate that some of this heroin is going to find its way to the Western world. Some of it already is being seized in the major United States ports — New York, Miami, San Francisco and Seattle."

Right now, Warner said, there's a sizable oversupply of No. 4 heroin — equivalent to the best out of Marseilles. It's been stockpiled for lack of buyers.

The heroin traffickers, he said, had expected the United States to remain in Southeast Asia for the next quarter of a century. The troop pullout caught them off guard.

"We have pictures showing how they have doubled the plant capacity of their heroin laboratories," Warner said. "They're still producing because they have chemists under contract, but they're trying to sell practically at cost while they try to link up with American and European buyers. We know heroin is still in the pipeline."

The Chinese dominating this traffic are the overseas Chinese, motivated by profit rather than ideology. Warner rejected the oft-expressed theory that the Chinese Communists

are seeking world domination by making the young people of the West slaves to narcotics.

The intelligence chief said Peking officials can claim little influence over the border provinces where opium is the principal and usually only money crop. The tribesmen who grow the opium, he explained, live on both the Chinese and Burmese sides of the border and ignore the central governments of both countries.

Instead, they deal with the various insurgent forces who war with each other to gain control of the area. Opium, in effect, pays for these tribal wars.

The farmers sell the raw opium to the insurgent forces whose leaders differ little from the old Chinese warlords.

Those leaders process the opium into morphine base or into No. 3 smoking heroin or No. 4 heroin. They safeguard it, escorting the shipments from remote areas and transport the finished product to distribution networks in Laos, Thailand, Vietnam and Hong Kong.

Pay With Weapons

The overseas Chinese pay for the heroin principally with guns the warring insurgent forces need to keep going.

One factor leading to increased production in the "golden triangle," Warner said, was the introduction of hermetically sealed packs which made it possible to keep No. 4 heroin from deteriorating.

Production of No. 4 heroin goes back to about 1967. With the increased military presence in Vietnam, Warner said, many of the laboratory operators saw an expanding market for the new product.

Up to then, most of the 750 tons of opium produced annually in the "golden triangle" was consumed by addicts in the area in the form of smoking opium or No. 3 smoking heroin, which addicts put on a

ther inhaled through or sucked the smoke through a straw.

When Chinese traffickers started selling No. 4 heroin to American troops, Warner said, they told them it was cocaine — and was not addictive.

The bottom has dropped out of their business just at the time when farmers produced a bumper crop of opium, in March and April.

"The traffickers are still buying this year's opium crop," Warner said, "but we don't know their plans for producing No. 4 heroin. We assume they will produce some but will adjust to the market. We know the price is moving up a little as they see the end of their tremendous oversupply and start gearing up again.

"The Chinese entrepreneurs, however, are not going to overextend themselves now that the troops are no longer there to make it easy for them. They don't like to take chances. They don't like to deal with people they don't know and they don't like to deal with Caucasians."

Forces Stiffened

Being aware of that attitude and concerned about that ton of heroin pointed in this direction, BNDD Director John E. Ingersoll has announced that BNDD is going to increase its forces in the Philippines. Here's his reasoning:

The Philippines are on the route of the traffic moving from Southeast Asia to the United States. Most Filipinos speak English and have good contacts in the United States. They have close commercial ties with the Chinese and language ties with Latin America. They could well emerge as the middlemen of the traffic.

Latin American ties are relevant because Latin America has been the transshipment point for heroin shipped from Europe to the United States.

Despite some testimony on Capitol Hill that much of the massive flow of heroin moving through the Philippines on its way to the United States